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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3394
INFO RUEHMV/AMEMBASSY MONROVIA 0611
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0585

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 000865

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STATE FOR AF/W-PDAVIS, INR/AA-BGRAVES, AND PRM/AFR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2017

TAGS: PREL PREF IV LI

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE'S OVERVIEW

(C) 1. Summary. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Country Representative Sabe Azam told Charge August 16 that UNHCR is conducting a verification exercise to determine the number of Liberians left in Cote d'Ivoire after the June 30 repatriation. Azam said President Gbagbo has no objection to local integration of Liberians. Azam stated that, while there may be Liberian "militia" in Cote d'Ivoire, recruiting is probably not going on. Azam noted that until the government has an administrative presence in the areas of return, there will be no massive returns by internally displaced persons (IDPs). Azam believes Ivorians are committed to peace, but that the question is whether an agreement can be reached regarding the electoral process. He added that identification cannot be accomplished in a short period time. According to Azam, the Ivorian crisis requires a political, rather than a legal, solution. End Summary.

¶2. (C) UNHCR Country Representative Sabe Azam informed Charge August 16 that UNHCR completed voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees on June 30 and is currently conducting a verification exercise to determine how many Liberians are left in Cote d'Ivoire. Azam said he raised local integration of Liberians, which for UNHCR includes citizenship, with Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo and that Gbagbo said he had no objection. Azam stated that Cote d'Ivoire has a tradition of hospitality and noted that there were no camps for Liberian refugees in Cote d'Ivoire because the Liberians were taken in by host families and communities. However, he noted that that there are serious protection problems and suggested that the international community should pay more attention to that issue. Azam told the Charge that he cannot say that there are no Liberian "militia" in Cote d'Ivoire. He said Liberians with combat experience and weapons are available for hire, but that recruiting is probably not going on since it is unlikely there will be a resumption of violence in Cote d'Ivoire. Azam said he has discussed this issue with the Liberian Ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire and that she responded that Liberia can use persons with military experience in the armed forces and police.

¶3. (SBU) Azam said UNHCR is concerned about IDPs in the west of the country. He noted that UNHCR is attempting to render return areas more attractive for IDPs. He explained that most areas of return are under the control of the Forces Nouvelles (FN) and government administration and social services are lacking. Azam said that until the government has an administrative presence in the areas of return, there will be no massive returns. Azam noted that Minister of Solidarity and War Victims Louis Dacoury-Tabley would visit with the militia leader in the west August 17.

¶4. (SBU) Azam believes that the actions taken to date to implement the Ouagadougou Political Accord (OPA) are not merely symbolic. He said the parties to the OPA just cannot proceed on implementation as quickly as the international

community would like. Azam believes Ivorians are committed to peace, but that the question is whether an agreement can be reached regarding the electoral process. Azam stated that UNHCR is committed to preventing statelessness. He noted that it is not possible to accomplish the identification process in a short span of time since Ivorians do not have a culture of documentation. Azam said the identification issue needs to be separated from the country's political crisis and addressed by whoever wins the elections. According to Azam, Cote d'Ivoire needs a "blanket political solution." Azam added that the land issue is linked to identification since only citizens can own land. Azam told the Charge that land in Cote d'Ivoire does not belong to the state, but to the village chiefs who can distribute it to others. Azam believes the judiciary faces a real challenge in resolving land disputes since purchasers of land do not have documentation attesting to the sale.

HUDDLESTON